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PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHLGB #0009/01 0070814
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6560
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP 0145
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0348

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000009

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/7/2010
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: UDPR PARTY LEADER ON RWANDAN POLITICS, LEGISLATIVE
PROCESS, AND EAC INTEGRATION

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Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The leader of Rwanda's small UDPR party, who is a member of parliament, told polcouns December 30 that Rwanda needed strong and stable government and economic growth. Rwanda's parliament was working hard to pass legislation related the East African Community (EAC), he said; however, government needed to do more to help Rwandan businesses and individuals compete with their EAC neighbors. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) During a December 30 meeting with polcouns, Union Democratique du Peuple Rwandais (UDPR) party leader Gonzague Rwigema said that as a party, the UDPR's influence was limited and it had to "work hard" to promote its ideas. The UDPR, he said, has no positions in government and only one seat in both Rwanda's lower house of parliament and in the East African Legislative Assembly. Nevertheless, Rwigema himself is able to exercise some influence as a member of parliament who sits on the economic/financial committee.

RWANDA NEEDS STRONG, COHESIVE GOVERNMENT

¶3. (C) Rwigema said the UDPR was founded in 1992, was politically allied to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and opposed to the then-government of Juvenal Habyarimana. The UDPR's leaders died during the 1994 genocide, which left behind a devastated country. Rwanda was left without functioning state institutions, its economy was shattered, there were hundreds of thousands of returned refugees and displaced persons, and former genocidaires continued to infiltrate the country and carry out raids. "We needed a strong leader," Rwigema emphasized. At the time, it was very difficult to imagine any sort of post-conflict reconciliation.

¶4. (C) When asked about governance generally, Rwigema said that although Rwanda has recovered from the immediate effects of the genocide and civil war, the primary concerns are first, security, and second, economics, because it is dangerous to practice "politics on an empty stomach." Burundi, for example, has five former presidents who are all part of the senate; they are equals, and hold each other in contempt. In Rwanda, one cannot insult the president, and people prefer a strong leader--they do not want instability. Again making a contrast with Burundi, he noted that there are several political parties in Burundi, all roughly equal, whereas in Rwanda there is no real opposition to President Kagame's candidacy for re-election. (Note: Rwanda's presidential elections are set for August 9, 2010. End Note.) Bernard Ntaganda, leader of the small PS-Imberakuri party, was not serious and was "needlessly insulting" to other Rwandan politicians. Rwanda does have its faults, its problems, Rwigema admitted, but p

olitical activists outside the country paint too negative a picture of Rwanda.

RWANDA'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

15. (C) Discussing the legislative process, Rwigema explained that Rwanda's lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, has 11 standing committees, generally consisting of seven members each. In order for a committee to function properly, it needed two or three members who were subject-matter experts and active participants; many members lacked expertise, and some simply "do nothing." He added that some committees, such as on human rights or social issues, work only part-time, whereas others (such as his own, the economic/financial committee) put in full days. Although parliament is currently in recess, with its next session due to begin in early February, Rwigema and other members of the economic/financial committee would begin meeting in January because it had much work to do. Commenting on trends, he said that previously, the government would give draft legislation to parliament and urge its quick passage. Due to some cases in which the government asked parliament to revise legislation that had been adopted only months earlier, parliamentarians were now more inclined to push back and demand more time to consider legislation, to get it right the first time. Only about half of all legislation--organic laws, not ordinary laws--passes through the Senate, Rwigema continued. Senators tended to be older, less active and had less expertise than counterparts in the lower chamber.

ADAPTING TO THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

16. (C) One of the main preoccupations of the economic/financial committee has been passing legislation to harmonize Rwanda's laws with those of its East African

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Community (EAC) neighbors. This was complex because Rwanda's legal code was based on civil law, whereas other EAC countries' were based on common law, which is much more detailed. So far, he argued, Rwanda had seen little benefit from joining the EAC customs union; many small businesses found it hard to meet increased paperwork requirements and increased duties had driven up the cost of imports from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which is not part of the EAC). An additional challenge, Rwigema continued, was frequent personnel changes in the Government of Rwanda (GOR), from ministers to civil servants, which meant that institutions often lost valuable technical expertise. In terms of policy, the GOR needed to do more to encourage manufacturing in Rwanda, to help address its growing trade imbalance. Also, while the GOR had devoted much energy to attracting foreign investment such as by creating the Rwanda Development Board, it now needed to focus on agriculture, which employs 90 percent of the population, to include providing subsidies to farmers. Rwigema noted that while Rwanda was more advanced than its neighbors in fields such as information technology, it also needed to improve education and especially English-language training, lest firms from Kenya and Uganda out-compete Rwandans.

17. (C) BIO NOTE: Rwigema was born in approximately 1965 in Gitarama. He is married with four children ranging in age from 19 to 14. A Tutsi and a self-described genocide survivor, he explained that he and his wife had two children and were going to stop there, but after the 1994 genocide, they decided to have two more because so many had died. Rwigema joined the UDPR in 1994 and served as its treasurer since then, becoming party president more recently (NFI). He became a member of parliament in October 2008, after legislative elections in September that year. A businessman by background, he owns a small coffee plantation near Gitarama, and previously worked as an accountant and a consultant. Rwigema attended high school in Butare, and studied at the Universite Libre de Kigali as well as at a French-sponsored business institute in Kigali that no longer

exists. He speaks French, Kinyarwanda and Swahili, and said he reads but does not speak much English.

18. (C) COMMENT: As an organization, the UDPR is one of Rwanda's micro-parties. It fielded candidates in coalition with the ruling RPF party during legislative elections in 2003 and 2008, and supported President Kagame's 2003 presidential bid. Rwigema's comments and concerns about EAC integration focused on Rwanda's ability to adapt and compete within the new context; he saw integration as something positive generally for Rwanda. This view is shared by most Rwandan leaders, who greatly value EAC membership and integration and believe that if Rwanda is to succeed, it can only do so by opening its economy and embracing globalization. END COMMENT.
SYMINGTON